



The City Of San Diego

**Councilmember Jim Madaffer**  
*City Council District 7*



## **The Firestorm - Two Weeks Later**

It has been two weeks now since the fires burned out of control in San Diego County. Everyone has been affected in one way or another. We all are indebted to the heroic efforts of our fire fighters, police, and other emergency personnel who worked around the clock to protect others. Some people measure the fire in terms of losses. I measure it in terms of successes and thank those who saved so many lives.

### **Somber Statistics**

The grim news is that the Cedar, Paradise and Otay fires burned 391,856 acres in the San Diego region and damaged or destroyed 2,470 homes and another 758 structures. Structural damaged is estimated at \$890 million. It is estimated that the total cost of the California fires in property damage and other costs will exceed \$2.2 billion.

Closer to home in District 7, there were 47 homes lost or damaged in Tierrasanta. This includes 5 structures that contained 15 condo and apartment units. There were 21 structures damaged that included 32 condo and apartment units.

My staff and I visited every family in Tierrasanta who tragically lost their home or had major damage due to the fires. We heard first-hand their story of loss and suffering and witnessed their courage in facing the future. My office has served as a clearing house and we began matching up needs in the community with resources available. Amid the unfolding events of this natural disaster it has been gratifying to see the outpouring of help and donations. The community has really come together in this time of need and I'm convinced we'll be stronger as a result.

### **President's tour and a photographic archive**

It was also gratifying to see that President Bush cared enough about the firestorm in San Diego to

pay us a visit and tour some of the hardest hit areas of East San Diego County. There is no question, support from FEMA has been strong and it has helped in our rebuilding process.

I've compiled on my website many photographs from the fire scenes as well as an aerial tour of San Diego County following the fires. [You're invited to view the pictures at my website by clicking on this link.](#)

### **District 7 Fire Relief Forum**

Mike Brown, Undersecretary of Homeland Security, flew out from Washington, D.C. to join Mayor Dick Murphy and I at the District 7 Fire Relief Forum in Tierrasanta on Wednesday, October 29, 2003. It was a standing-room-only crowd that gave Fire Chief Jeff Bowman and Police Chief William Lansdowne an ovation.

We had representatives from many city departments such as the Development Services (building permits), Environmental Services, Water Department, and Park and Recreation. Also, representatives from the insurance industry, building industry, SDG&E, City Schools, the District Attorney's office and social agencies including the Alpha Project, were on hand to answer questions and make resources available. After two hours of discussion, it became very clear that, firstly, Tierrasanta residents are very grateful for the outpouring of help and, secondly, we need to change some City policies.

### **Changing Policy**

Pointing fingers won't bring back burned homes. What we can do is work together to make changes in order to prevent a similar fire disaster in the future. At the November 3rd City Council meeting we discussed several issues including changing brush management policy, changing shake shingle roof policy, in addition to waiving building permit fees. The Council asked the City Manager to report back in 60 days with viable options.

I have heard and will pursue many common-sense suggestions including changing construction standards for homes near open space areas. Ideas include protecting of eaves, creating a wider defensible space between homes and open space, and the use of stucco instead of wood siding near open space areas. Additionally, I am working with our legislative leaders in both Sacramento and Washington D.C. as well as locally to create a program to encourage the replacement of wood shingle roofs. Wood shingle roofs pose perhaps the greatest fire danger to homes and the homes surrounding them.

We have been working with residents in Tierrasanta by clearing the brush in open space areas bordering homes to create a better defensible space. Conflicting City policies must be changed so residents will be permitted to create a defensible space and clear brush immediately surrounding their homes.

## **Erosion**

With the first rain storm hitting San Diego today and the threats of flash floods, there is one word on everyone's mind: erosion. Of immediate concern is what will happen when the soil, baked by the fire storm, can't absorb the water. Runoff and mudslides have potential to do great damage and so controlling erosion has taken on an even greater significance.

At my request, the City has provided free sandbags for Tierrasanta residents to help them with erosion control. Sandbags are available at the east end of Clairemont Mesa Boulevard near the entrance to Mission Trails Regional Park. The City will continue to make sandbags available for the residents of Tierrasanta as needed. Sandbags are also available in Scripps Ranch and other areas of the County.

In addition, the County of San Diego is offering a free special seed mix available at five road stations within the County. I am working with the City Manager's office for a similar service within the City.

In closing, let me once again assure you that we are all in this together and will rebuild our community stronger than ever.

PS: We apologize if a few of you may have received a duplicate email. We are working to correct this problem.

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